ROYAL BRITISH COLUMBIA MUSEUM

Aboriginal Material Operating Policy

Issue Date
2003

BACKGROUND:

The mission of the Royal British Columbia Museum is to provide public programs and objective information about the cultural and natural environments of British Columbia, past and present, in a relevant, accessible, consultative, and entrepreneurial style.

The Province of British Columbia has an interest in maintaining a collection of Aboriginal material culture at the Royal British Columbia Museum for scientific, educational and other public purposes. The Province also has an interest in maintaining standards of care regarding cultural property acquired with public funds, wherever that cultural property is located.

POLICY:

- The Museum is committed to the involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the interpretation of their cultures as represented in exhibits, education programs, and public programming developed by the Museum. The Museum is committed to a continuous dialogue with Aboriginal communities in British Columbia in relation to its collections, repatriation policies, and co-operative management efforts.

- The Museum acknowledges that all Aboriginal materials, including human remains, burial objects, ceremonial objects, communally-owned property, as well as archival records, tapes, films, photographs, and research information is part of the intellectual and cultural heritage of the respective Aboriginal peoples. Therefore, the utmost respect by researchers, curators, and interpreters of those cultures must be maintained.

- A case-by-case approach will be used to deal with all issues regarding Aboriginal material, recognising the need for a collaborative approach to be based on moral and ethical criteria in addition to following legal requirements.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of this policy are to:

- facilitate the return of human remains, and cultural objects which may have been acquired under circumstances that render the Museum's claim invalid, to originating Aboriginal communities, when it is the wish of those Aboriginal communities.

- respond to initiatives of the Provincial treaty negotiations.

- increase involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the Museum's interpretation of their culture and history.

- enable the Museum to work collaboratively with Aboriginal peoples to co-operatively manage the care and custody of cultural objects of Aboriginal origin in the Royal British Columbia Museum collection.

- facilitate co-operative relationships between the Museum and Aboriginal museums and/or cultural centres to improve the care, documentation, and interpretation of Aboriginal material, wherever it is held.

- enable the maintenance of a Provincial collection of Aboriginal material culture at the Museum.

PROCEDURES:

- The Museum will continue to fulfil its mandate, legislated in the *Museum Act* (1979), to collect, preserve and interpret for the general public significant objects and data representing all the Aboriginal peoples of British Columbia.

- This policy is in accordance with established policy and the 1991 recommendations of the *Task Force Report on Museums and First Peoples* by the Assembly of First Nations and the Canadian Museums Association.

- This policy will be enacted within the legal requirements of relevant federal and provincial legislation.

Access:

The Museum is aware of the importance of the authority of originating cultures regarding their cultural heritage. The Royal British Columbia Museum will continue to provide for:

- enhanced involvement of Aboriginal peoples in the interpretation of their culture and history through Museum programs.

- enhanced access to Aboriginal material in the Museum collection by Aboriginal peoples, recognising the importance of access by Aboriginal peoples to their sacred materials, cultural objects and relevant documentation.

- The Museum will endeavour to make available to the appropriate Aboriginal communities information relating to Aboriginal collections, as requested.

Co-operative Management:

- The Museum has historically demonstrated its commitment to working as a partner with Aboriginal communities, and recognises the right of originating cultures to participate in the interpretation and management of their cultural heritage in the Museum.

- The Museum endorses the practice of co-operative management with Aboriginal communities in British Columbia. The co-operative care, preservation, exchange of information, and exhibition of Aboriginal cultural property in the Museum's collection shall be pursued through recognised Aboriginal cultural centres in the province, or recognised cultural arbiters of the Aboriginal community.

- The Museum will consult with Aboriginal peoples, in order to:
    - advise the Museum on co-operative management issues.
    - assist in the development of programs that ensure Aboriginal peoples access to Aboriginal material in the Museum collections.
    - advise the Museum on the desired interpretation of Aboriginal culture in exhibits, signage, public programs, education programs, and publications.

- The Museum may enter into co-operative management agreements with British Columbia Aboriginal groups including bands, tribal councils, and Aboriginal-administered museums, cultural centres and cultural societies or committees.

Repatriation:

The Museum is committed to:

- the return of human remains and directly associated burial objects, upon the request of an Aboriginal community with a demonstrable claim of historical relationship to those objects in question.

- the return of objects that may have been acquired under circumstances that render the Museum's claim invalid, at the request of an Aboriginal community with a demonstrable claim of an historical relationship to those objects in question.

- negotiating with Aboriginal communities on the return of material culture of spiritual significance or essential to cultural survival, at the request of an Aboriginal

community, bearing in mind the Provincial interests, and in the context of ongoing treaty negotiations.

Return of Human Remains:

- The Museum acknowledges that the retention of Aboriginal human remains against the expressed wishes of the originating Aboriginal communities is not appropriate.
- The wishes of Aboriginal communities in regard to human remains will be respected.
- All requests for the return of human remains, by an Aboriginal community who can demonstrate cultural affiliation or other claim of historical relationship, will be accommodated on a case-by-case basis.

Return of Burial Objects:

- The wishes of Aboriginal communities in regard to burial objects will be respected.
- All requests for the return of burial objects by an Aboriginal community who can demonstrate cultural affiliation or other claim of historical relationship will be accommodated on a case-by-case basis.

Return of Sacred and Ceremonial Objects:

- The Museum may negotiate the return, to the appropriate Aboriginal communities, of sacred and ceremonial objects of religious significance and essential to the continuation of ceremonial and ritual life among Aboriginal people. In the case of ceremonial and religious material, the claimant must demonstrate that the materials are needed by a traditional Aboriginal leader or leaders for traditional Aboriginal practices.
- Each request for the return of sacred and ceremonial objects will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Loans:

- The Museum may loan contemporary objects from the Potlatch Collection for use by an Aboriginal community or communities in traditional ceremonies, subject to mutual agreement respecting appropriate use, length of loan period, and physical risk to the object(s).

- The Museum may loan objects and/or artifacts from the Aboriginal collection, for display purposes, to Aboriginal cultural centres and other facilities, subject to mutual agreement respecting appropriate use, length of loan period, and physical risk to the object(s).

Interpretation:

- The Museum acknowledges the right of Aboriginal peoples to interpret their own histories. Accordingly, the Museum will actively involve Aboriginal individuals who represent their respective cultures in the development of new public programs and exhibits pertaining to that peoples' history and culture.

- Consultation with knowledgeable members of the Aboriginal communities will be facilitated through the Museum staff and the Board of Directors, to ensure the appropriate Aboriginal voice and interpretation.

Approved _____ Date February 18, 2003

Pauline Rafferty
Chief Executive Officer